

THE SHORT ROUTE TO EUROPE AND CANADIAN PORTS.

THE question of a short northern route across the Atlantic is of importance to the world of commerce at large, and of special interest to the commerce of the lake ports. The adoption of such a route will inevitably deflect the lines of transportation in succeeding years, to the further advantage of those inland ports which are already beginning to gain an advantage through the deep-water-way improvements.

The saving in time lies in the shorter distance by sea from a mainland port to Cape Race, and manifestly there is nothing in this to increase the ratio of danger, the course being still shielded from the ice fields and bergs of the Arctic regions by Newfoundland. From Cape Race to the coast of England the present ocean lane can be followed. In respect to the long haul overland as against the low tariff of water transport, it may be well to bear in mind that railways are continually reducing rates to meet water competition and that passengers, mails, express and perishable merchandise will seek the speediest transit.¹ The law of compensation also suggests other considerations, as steamships on this route will require less fuel and have in consequence additional room for freight. The difficulties of diverting traffic from established channels is somewhat of a specious argument, as the conflict of interests is such, that in matters of this kind, modifications and changes are always capable of being made. Moreover the growth of the West and the Northwest with their great cities demanding closer communication with Europe creates a condition which must be recognized, and even of more significance in this connection is the steady development of our neighbor on the north, the Dominion of Canada.

¹ The speed by rail is more than twice as great as that by water.

In proportion to the growth of the country will be the growth of her commerce, and her Atlantic ports as the direct outlets of the trunk lines from the West, north of Chicago,¹ must as a consequence be utilized. If from the wilderness of her Pacific coast can spring flourishing seaport cities, almost in a day, the lack of commercial centers on her Atlantic seaboard is not incapable of being overcome, especially as the interchange of commodities with England and France will far exceed the trade with China, Japan and Australia.

Whatever of novelty there may appear in the discussion of this subject, and however bitterly it is now assailed as an innovation that must be viewed with suspicion, it is of interest to note that the matter occupied the public mind nearly half a century ago.

During the summer of 1850 a convention was held at Portland, Maine, which was largely attended by influential persons from various parts of the United States and the British Provinces, as they were then called, and a series of resolutions were adopted declaratory of the unanimous opinion "that the spirit of the age demands a shorter way of interchange between Europe and America than even the present reduced passage affords." At this time "the magnificent steamers employed by Mr. Cunard under the contract with the Lords of the Admiralty" and by Mr. Collins under contract with the United States Government had reduced the ocean trip to "almost a nine days' certainty."² It

¹ Liverpool and Southampton are by the direct course nearer Chicago in point of time than they are to New York by the existing ocean route. For illustration :

				Days Hours Min.		
New York to Liverpool,						
<i>via</i> Sandy Hook, 3148 miles, at 20 knots				6	13	24
Chicago to Eastern Nova Scotia,				Days	Hours	
- 1600 " at 50 miles				1	8	
Nova Scotia to Liverpool,						
- - 2387 " at 20 knots				4	23	
				6	7	21

² In comparison with which we have the recent feat of the "Lucania" in making the run from Daunt's Rock to Sandy Hook Light, a distance of 2779 miles, in 5 days, 7 hours and 23 minutes. At this speed the passage *via* the short route would be made in four days *from port to port*.

was accordingly determined "to effect a junction by extending the lines of railway at present in operation in the United States to the eastern seaboard of Nova Scotia and thence, by bridging the Atlantic with powerful steamers, to some place in Ireland." The building of the European and North American Railway across the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia was in contemplation and the project awakened such general interest that a meeting of the inhabitants of the county of Cape Breton was held at Sydney, C. B. in February 1851 "to particularly point out the capabilities and advantages of the harbor of Sydney" as the terminus in summer. The winter ports, urging their claims for recognition, were Halifax, Whitehaven and Louisburg, but the construction of steamships of increased speed soon diverted the attention of the public and not until comparatively recent years has the subject of the short sea-route assumed any degree of prominence.

Upon the completion in Canada of an immense railway system from ocean to ocean and the establishment of a line of subsidized steamships on the Pacific, it became evident that the efficiency of the route depended upon an adequate Atlantic service. The matter was frequently discussed in influential Canadian circles and at last took definite form in the proposal of an English firm to build three express steamers of 7500 tons each to develop twenty knots speed at sea for carriage of the Atlantic mails, provided a subsidy was granted in excess of that received by the Allan line, whose contract had expired. The Dominion Government accepted the terms, and a contract was signed July 16, 1889. Unforeseen obstacles in no way affecting the feasibility of the route ultimately led to a withdrawal from the contract by the English people.

The year following the Parliament at Ottawa voted a subsidy of \$500,000 per annum and invited tenders for a weekly steamship mail service between Canada and Great Britain and France by first-class steamers of not less than eighteen knots speed from port to port, the service to be for a period of ten years from April 12, 1891. Alternative tenders were also asked for a

service with steamers to make an average speed of not less than nineteen knots an hour. The port in England was to be either Plymouth or Southampton, and Cherbourg was named as the objective point in France. The Canadian termini were to be Quebec in summer and Halifax, or Halifax and St. John in winter, the steamers calling to land and embark mails at Rimouski during the season of navigation. A provisional contract was soon after entered into with a company of great financial strength, whose leading representative was Mr. Bryce Douglas of Barrow-in-Furness. Owing, however, to the critical condition of the money market both at home and abroad, and the sudden death of Mr. Douglas, negotiations were abruptly terminated. Subsequent offers were received, but not entertained, involving as they did in some instances the lease of the Government railway, and the project has never appeared so certain of consummation as at the present day.

In February of last year (1894) a proposition was submitted to the government of the Dominion by persons of influence in England and Australia, the governing idea of which was to make Canada an imperial highway "not only to its own people and for its own mails, but to many points in the United States of America, to and from parts of Europe, Australia, New Zealand, China and Japan, to Fiji, Hawaiian Islands and to India around the world." This comprehensive scheme originally embraced both the Pacific and Atlantic service, but was afterwards modified to include only the Atlantic, allowing the Pacific contract with the government to remain undisturbed. Conditional upon the approval of Parliament an agreement was made, providing for a service of four steamships of 8000 to 10,000 registered tonnage, capable of steaming twenty knots an hour at sea for passengers and freight, "to be fitted with refrigerator machinery for the transportation of beef, fish and game and other perishable articles in a chilled or frozen condition." Trips to be weekly from Quebec and Halifax to a port in England to be hereafter agreed upon, for which an annual subsidy of \$750,000 should be paid the first ten years and \$500,000 the succeeding ten years.

Before the matter reached Parliament for final disposition delegates from eastern Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island presented the claims of their several ports for the western terminus of the line, as it appeared that the interests of the country at large, requiring the most efficient mail service, could be better subserved by the adoption of a port more favorably located than those already specified and by this means obviate the expense and inconvenience of a division of the service. These claims received respectful attention, and the conclusion was reached that the winter port question at least should remain an open one, its determination to rest to a large extent with the steamship company itself. The full text of the resolution pertaining to the Fast Atlantic Mail Service as adopted July 1894 is as follows, viz: "That it is expedient to provide that the governor-in-council may enter into a contract for a term not exceeding ten years with any individual or company for the performance of a fast weekly steamship service between Canada and the United Kingdom, making connection with a French port, on such terms and conditions as to the carriage of mails and otherwise as the governor-in-council deems expedient, for a subsidy not exceeding the sum of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year."

With concessions from England¹ in the interests of imperial unity the undertaking will bear the imprint of success at its inception. The establishment of this Trans-Atlantic Fast Steamship Mail Service will ultimately lead to the adoption of the short route to Europe by competing lines,² as a matter of self-preservation, and as some of the finest ports in the world are to be found on the North Atlantic coast, a comparison of their relative merits is not without its interest.

There are many things that necessarily enter into the study of the subject; the port must be open to navigation the year round, have deep water sufficient to float the high-class modern boats, be safe, commodious, easy of access, have ample terminal

¹ An annual mail subsidy of \$250,000 and the Admiralty Subvention of \$125,000 for use of the steamers in time of war.

² France already contemplates establishing a line of steamships to run direct from one of her ports to Canada, in order to avoid the surtax in England.

facilities, be in direct line to Europe with the shortest practicable sea-route, and to these should be added a comparative freedom from fog and no tidal delays.

The farthest point north on the mainland coast that has received consideration is the port of Cape Charles, Labrador.¹ To this harbor it has been proposed to construct a railway from Quebec, a distance of 850 miles, at an estimated cost of \$30,000,000, and to maintain a daily service, by a fleet of express steamers, to Liverpool 1940 miles distant or to Galway, Ireland, some 1600 miles. The advocates of this route contend that the engineering difficulties can be overcome, the climatic conditions are not unfavorable, the fog and ice which embarrass the passage through the Strait of Belle Isle are avoided and an open sea-route free from derelicts is secured. The assumption that there is freedom from snow and ice obstruction in latitudes so far north as to be unaffected by the Gulf Stream is certainly not supported by the preponderance of evidence, and as the route is not a direct course between established centers of trade, represented by London and Paris in the Old World and Montreal and Chicago in the New, it is doubtful if in the element of time it would meet the requirements of the present civilization.²

It is declared "without fear of contradiction" that speed is

¹ It may be stated in passing, that St. Johns, Newfoundland, since the completion of 400 miles of railway along the south and west coast to Bay of Islands, has become ambitious to be made the port of debarkation. Two routes have been suggested — one an all-rail communication with Quebec by means of a tunnel under the Strait of Belle Isle; the other being the maintenance of a ferry from some northern port in Cape Breton, across the Gulf of St. Lawrence, to connect with the new railway at Port-au-Basque. If the port of St. Johns is serviceable in winter, the routes are altogether too circuitous for time-saving.

² Southampton is rapidly becoming a formidable rival of Liverpool as a shipping port in England; it being but a short trip to London by rail or across water to France. Two of the great lines of trans-Atlantic steamships, the American and the North-German Lloyd, run there direct from New York, and others lines will soon find it to their advantage to adopt this, or a port as favorably located for the short route, such as Milford Haven or Plymouth. "The City of Rome" experimentally landed her passengers at the former port a few years ago, and hereafter the Hamburg-American is to run regular trips direct to the latter port. Such radical changes in the distributing joints of commerce will be opposed by the vested interests of the northern ports, but the movement has set in and cannot be checked.

incompatible with safety on what is termed the "St. Lawrence Route," that is, through the Strait of Belle Isle, Gulf and River St. Lawrence to Quebec and Montreal. These waters are closed to navigation in winter and are not wholly free from ice and fog during the open season. A writer with full knowledge of the subject asserts that :

The Arctic current sweeping along the eastern coast of Labrador extending about 400 miles seaward, carries with it from the frozen regions immense masses of ice, both field and berg, a portion of which is caught in the current running through the Strait of Belle Isle and carried in that direction. Many of these bergs being too large, *i. e.*, drawing too much water, to enter the Strait, ground at or near the entrance, where they remain sometimes for weeks. Many of the smaller ones are actually carried into the Strait, where, between drifting about with the eddy tides and grounding, a portion remain all summer. A few pass through what I may call the narrows and have been seen as far west as Macattine Island, the remainder finding their way back into the Atlantic on the southern side of the Belle Isle, with the assistance of a current which runs in that direction along the Newfoundland side of the Strait.

Another writer, eminent in authority, states that "fog occurs outside and inside Belle Isle always with southwest or south winds. The temperature of the atmosphere rises with the wind from that quarter, and blowing over water cooled by the Arctic current produces thick vapor."

The Island of Anticosti is also somewhat of a menace to navigation in these waters, and although freight and passenger steamers of moderate speed find the route serviceable during the summer months, it may be fairly conceded that where time is the essence of the contract, the St. Lawrence Route would be classed as hazardous.

If the course of ships should pass south of Newfoundland, many of the objections adverted to would disappear ; or, if ports located on the Gulf and River St. Lawrence were in telegraphic communication with Belle Isle, steamships could make the outward passage either by way of the Strait or Cape Race, as

conditions might warrant. With this in view, a railway of 172 miles in length is to be built from a point on the Intercolonial Railway near Rimouski to Point St. Pierre, south of the entrance to the St. Lawrence River, a port which is said to possess superior facilities for constructing wharves and piers into deep water, and where navigation can be carried on all the year round. And a similar undertaking, though of greater magnitude, is the bridging the St. Lawrence near Montreal, and building, at an expenditure of \$20,000,000, a through trunk line from Sault Ste. Marie to Paspébiac, a port on Baie des Chaleurs, south of Point St. Pierre, which is also claimed as open in winter. These are admirable harbors and the projects possess much merit, but as they do not secure the shortest water route, they lack an essential feature. This is the objection in a greater degree to St. Andrews—at one time proposed as the terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway, as also to St. John and Halifax.

The Bay of Fundy ports have also the disadvantage of high tides and the prevalence of fog, but they are capacious and open in winter; St. John being the leading business center in the Maritime Provinces.

Navigation to Halifax in stormy or thick weather is sometimes attended with difficulty, if not danger, on account of the bold coast. The harbor is commodious, open all the year, has deep water and an entrance nearly six miles wide. As there is but a limited water front available at the city itself, it is proposed to make Dartmouth, on the opposite or eastern shore, the railway terminus. Possibly a drawback to these more southern ports is Sable Island, the "graveyard of the Atlantic," which is 85 miles southeast of the Nova Scotia coast and in the track of steamers from Europe.

The ports in eastern Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island are the most advantageously located for the short sea-route, and in the measure of time and distance by rail and water from a point off Cape Race in the path of ocean steamships to Moncton, which is the gateway of the Peninsula of Nova Scotia, they stand relatively upon the same footing. Sydney, at which place the

railway from Port Hawkesbury terminates, and Louisburg are the two most important harbors on the Island of Cape Breton. The former possesses a fine harbor, frequently compared to that of Sydney, Australia, but it cannot be classed as an open port, as there is an ice embargo from four to five months in winter. The entrance is two miles wide, easy of access and without rock or shoal. Six miles inland from the entrance, there are two arms, each with a length of five miles and breadth of one and one-half to two miles, one running in a westerly direction, on which the town of North Sydney¹ is located, and the other in a southerly direction, forming the Sydney harbor proper. There is deep water, good anchorage grounds and very little or no fog.

South and east of Sydney and connected with that place by rail is the old French town of Louisburg, which the Dominion Coal Company, limited, is to utilize as its shipping port during the winter season. The extreme width of the entrance to this harbor is one mile, but the ship's channel, from Battery Island to the northern shore, cannot exceed one-half of that distance.

"The noble port of Louisburg," as it has been styled, has good depth of water, is open in winter, and the northeast and southwest arms,² each of which is about one mile long by one-half mile wide, afford safe anchorage. Occasionally in the spring the entrance is blocked with drift ice and the port is not as readily made by ships as that of Sydney; it is, however, nearer Galway, Ireland, the distance being 1940 miles, while that of Sydney is 1950 miles. A railway ninety miles in length is to be constructed from a point near Port Hawkesburg to this harbor.

If landings are made at the Cape Breton ports, it is necessary to cross the Strait of Canso by ferry, and should this seem a disadvantage without offset in the saving of time, there is a project to connect by rail the Intercolonial system terminating at Port Mulgrave on the main land with a port seven miles distant at the south-eastern entrance of the Strait of Canso, where ample facilities for

¹ North Sydney is seeking to supplant Rimouski as the port of call in summer.

² In some severe winters the northeast arm has been frozen over, but tug boats, it is asserted, can without difficulty keep a channel open.

terminals are afforded. The approach to this harbor is readily foretold by the definite character of the soundings, and its entrance is twelve and a half miles wide without island, bar or shoal. Chedabucto Bay constitutes what may be called the outer harbor, the inner being formed by the Strait of Canso, Inhabitants Bay (including Caribacou Cove) and the entrance to the Lennox Passage. There is deep water, safe anchorage, and the tide is four and a half feet. The harbor never freezes,¹ and there is no fog inside Cape Canso. This spacious harbor is scarcely inferior to the San Francisco Bay of California.

Whitehaven, south and west of Cape Canso, possesses an excellent harbor, secure, roomy, accessible at all seasons of the year, with deep water, good anchorage and an extreme length of seven miles. It has three entrances, one of which is the ship's channel. On account of a number of outlying ledges, navigation to the port is somewhat intricate, and fogs in the vicinity are not infrequent. A railway fifty miles in length has been surveyed from the Government Railway near New Glasgow, N. S., to Whitehaven. As Eastern Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island abound in coal fields, these ports have a distinct advantage over all others on the entire coast line. There are many fine harbors on the seaboard southwest of Whitehaven, but every mile in that direction increases the distance twofold between Cape Race and Moncton.

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¹The Strait of Canso is about twenty-one miles long, and at the narrows near its northwest entrance, an ice-jam forms in winter. When this breaks in the springtime more or less ice floats through the Strait, but does not obstruct navigation, the mail boat "Rimouski," eighty tons, making regular bi-weekly trips from Port Mulgrave to Arichat, Canso and Guysborough during the entire year, and the ferry steamer "Mulgrave," 300 tons, making daily passage across stream from Port Mulgrave to Point Tupper, Cape Breton.